

Introducing NSW

The early European history of Australia is also the history of NSW – British explorer Captain James Cook named his 'discovery' New South Wales in 1770 when he sailed up the east coast and landed at Botany Bay. The Aborigines, however, had been leading a peaceful, bountiful existence on the coast and the ranges long before. For the traveller, Australia's original convict settlement is still the most popular international gateway. Cosmopolitan Sydney, with its beautiful harbour setting and easy-going lifestyle, is one of the world's great cities. Within easy reach are many beaches and forests, the spectacular Blue Mountains and the wineries of the Hunter Valley.

The coastal route from Sydney to Queensland is deservedly popular and firmly entrenched on the backpacker trail. It passes through resort towns like Byron Bay and an endless string of superb, often deserted beaches, and offers access to the national parks of the Great Dividing Range. Australia's largest ski fields are in the Kosciuszko National Park, but this is also a superb place in summer for walking, mountain biking, fishing and horse riding. The south coast is just as scenic as the north coast but less developed.

On the Great Dividing Range is a series of high tablelands, including New England, with its spectacular gorges and waterfalls. West of the range you'll meet rural Australia. There are some fine old towns in the rich farmlands of the western slopes and another winery area around Mudgee. Further west are the vast landscapes of the great plains, merging into the baking outback in the northwest. South of the plains is the Riverina with its lazy rivers, fruit-growing areas and red gum forests.

From ancient Aboriginal sites to atmospheric country pubs, practically everything that's considered 'typically Australian' can be found in NSW.

State-Wide Must Sees & Dos

Byron Bay – Experience this northern utopia's balmy weather, endless beaches, delightful accommodation, delectable food and fabulous nightlife. If you tire of the crowds, head to some of the great little towns nearby, like Lennox Head and Bangalow, or climb Mt Warning.

Blue Mountains – Visit this excellent natural habitat for magnificent scenery, fantastic bushwalking, gum trees, gorges, outdoor activities and great dining and accommodation.

Kosciuszko National Park – Explore caves, lakes, forests and Australia's highest mountain, Mt Kosciuszko (2,228m), in NSW's largest national park. Come in winter for skiing or in summer to bushwalk.

Eden – In October/November go whale watching from this charming fishing port, or see dolphins, sea lions and sea birds at other times of the year.

Hunter Valley Wineries – Take a tour of the multitude of wineries in Australia's oldest wine region. Join a regular bus tour, hire a motorised tricycle, take your time in an open-air horse-drawn carriage, or see the vineyards from above in a hot-air balloon.

Broken Hill – Discover outback character at its best in this oasis in the desert fascinating not only for its comfortable existence in a tough environment but also for its silver mining history and artists' community.

Introducing Sydney

Sydney is Australia's oldest city, the economic powerhouse of the nation and the country's capital in everything but name. This amazing city buzzes with multicultural energy and offers everything anyone could ask for in a travel destination: a staggeringly beautiful harbour spanned by an equally striking bridge (known as 'The Coathanger'), the famous Opera House, a pleasant climate, heavenly beaches and surf, plenty of great restaurants, bars and nightlife, and interesting neighbourhoods. In short, Sydney is Australia's international darling.

It is ironic that a settlement that began life as a British penal colony has been transformed in just over 200 years into one of the world's most tolerant and diverse societies, with a mix of ethnic groups contributing to the city's cultural life. Chinese newspapers, Lebanese restaurants and Greek Orthodox churches are as much a part of the city as its English and Irish traditions. Evidence of the region's original inhabitants survives in the Aboriginal stencils to be found in coastal caves, and in the indigenous names of many streets and suburbs.

The harbour divides Sydney into north and south, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Harbour Tunnel joining the two shores (the suburbs north of the bridge are known collectively as the North Shore). The city centre is roughly from Circular Quay to Central Station. To the west is Darling Harbour, while to the east lie Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and Paddington. Three kilometres further southeast, along the coast, are the ocean-beach suburbs of Bondi and Coogee.

Sydney's Weather

Sydney is blessed with a balmy climate, rarely dropping below 10°C at night, with average summer temperatures of around 25°C and over 300 sunny days a year. Summer temperatures can reach 40°C and high humidity can make it oppressive, but heavy downpours often break the heat between October and March. Winters are cool rather than cold. The weather in March-April and October-November is delightful, with clear, warm days and mild nights.

Cultural Overview

Despite Sydneysiders' fixation with waterfront properties, the city's corporate culture has always been balanced by the knowledge that the best things about life here – the beaches, the mountains, the surf and the much-loved harbour – are open to all, and are free. Along with a strong outdoor culture Sydneysiders enjoy an equally vibrant arts culture, with an impressive array of world-class galleries, a thriving theatre and dance scene and, of course, the Sydney Opera House – the heart of performance in Australia. While it's the opera that really shines here, you can also witness theatre, comedy, music, dance and ballet. While Sydney doesn't have as dynamic a music scene as Melbourne, you can still find live music most nights of the week.

Don't Miss...

There's some seriously stunning stuff to see in Sydney; just walking around all day being amazed by the beauty of the city's harbour, dramatic cliffs and stunning beaches would be entertaining enough. You'll never run out of things to see and do in this superb city, but here are a few ideas to get you started.

Photograph, walk or best of all climb **Sydney Harbour Bridge**, one of Australia's most imposing and iconic sights. If you're low on money, check out the spectacular view from the Pylon Lookout, or, if money's not such an issue, you *must* do the once-in-a-lifetime **BridgeClimb**.

Sydney Harbour Bridge: The Rocks (*access from Cumberland St*). **Phone:** 02 9240 1100

BridgeClimb: 5 Cumberland St, The Rocks. **Phone:** 02 8274 7777 **Website:** www.bridgeclimb.com.au

Surf, swim, sunbathe or spectate at **Bondi Beach** (Campbell Pde), Sydney's most popular sweep of sand. It's also well worth taking the two-hour coastal walk from Bondi Golf Course to Coogee Beach, especially for the **Aboriginal rock engravings**. If you prefer less-populated beaches, try one of the many fabulous northern ones, such as **Bilgola, Palm Beach** or **Whale Beach**.

Take a scenic ferry ride to **Watsons Bay** and head to **Doyles Palace Hotel** for the time-honoured tradition of a beer in the beer garden, while enjoying the fabulous view of Sydney Harbour.

Doyles Palace Hotel: 10 Marine Pde. **Phone:** 02 9337 5444

Discover the richness of Australian marine life at the magnificent **Sydney Aquarium**, with its three 'oceanariums' moored in the harbour and transparent underwater tunnels.

Sydney Aquarium: Aquarium Pier, Darling Harbour. **Phone:** 02 8251 7800 **Website:** www.sydneyaquarium.com.au

Go shopping! The hub of city shopping is **Pitt St Mall**, but it's much more relaxing to shop for fashion on popular inner-city strips such as **Oxford St, Paddington**; for furnishings and antiques on **Queen St, Woollahra**; for CDs around **Crown St, Surry Hills**; and for souvenirs at **Paddy's Markets** in Chinatown.

Eat & Be Merry At...

Sydney's multicultural mixture, abundant fresh produce and stunning geographic setting make it a great place to dine; fine local wines, a vibrant cafe culture and magnificent harbour views are added extras. There are also plenty of great watering holes (that is, pubs and bars). The Rocks and Kings Cross areas are very popular, but attractive, relaxed places can be found in inner-city suburbs such as Surry Hills and Darlinghurst.

There are no words special enough to describe **Billy Kwong**, a wonderful Chinese restaurant where you'll be served delicious meals in a tiny, teahouse-style setting.

Billy Kwong: 3/355 Crown St, Surry Hills. **Phone:** 02 9332 3300

Eating fish & chips on the beach is a national pastime, so head to **A Fish Called Coogee** for some of the best, grab a spot on the sand and dine the Australian way.

A Fish Called Coogee: 229 Coogee Bay Rd, Coogee. **Phone:** 02 9664 7700

For a special occasion you can't go past **Icebergs Dining Room & Bar**. This stunning restaurant has a cliff-top location with incredible views and even better food. Make sure you book well in advance.

Icebergs Dining Room & Bar: 1 Notts Ave, Bondi. **Phone:** 02 9365 9000

Try **Darlo Bar** for a relaxing drink. Its great vibe attracts a lively crowd on weekends, the service is friendly and the interior relaxed and inviting.

Darlo Bar: 306 Liverpool St, Darlinghurst. **Phone:** 02 9331 3672

Another favourite place for a drink is **Paddington Inn Hotel**. The airy window seats are the best, but hardest, to get, especially on weekend afternoons when the nearby Paddington market is on.

Paddington Inn Hotel: 338 Oxford St, Paddington. **Phone:** 02 9380 5913

Sydney Events

Sydney loves a party, and any excuse will do. The city has plenty of festivals and special goings-on year-round. Following is a small sample; for more, visitor information centres will be able to advise you what's on when you're in town.

Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras – This world-famous, month-long festival, held from February to early March, includes a sports carnival, the Blessing of the Mardi Gras, theatre performances, a film festival and much more. It ends with an amazing parade (first Saturday in March) and the Mardi Gras Party.

Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras: Website: www.mardigras.org.au

City to Surf Run – On the second Sunday in August more than 50,000 runners pound the 14km from Park St in the city centre to Bondi Beach; some take it seriously, while others dress up in costumes and are just in it for fun.

City to Surf Run: Website: www.city2surf.sunherald.com.au

Festival of the Winds – Held on the second Sunday in September at Bondi Beach, this kite-flying festival with a multicultural theme includes competitions for the best home-made kites and music and dance performances.

Festival of the Winds: Website: www.aks.org.au

Sculpture By the Sea – This free outdoor sculpture exhibition utilises one of Sydney's greatest natural settings, the Bondi to Bronte coastal walk, to display stunning artworks from local and international artists.

Sculpture By the Sea: Website: www.sculpturebythesea.com

Sydney Hobart Yacht Race – On 26 December, Sydney Harbour is a sight to behold as hundreds of boats crowd its waters to farewell the yachts competing in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race.

Sydney Hobart Yacht Race: Website: rolexsydneyhobart.com/default.asp